

# Seattle Permits

— part of a multi-departmental City of Seattle series on getting a permit

## Design Review: General Information, Application Instructions, and Submittal Requirements

September 2003

The City of Seattle's Design Review process requires that certain new construction projects undergo a discretionary review of their siting and design characteristics, based on a set of citywide design guidelines.

This Client Assistance Memo (CAM) is intended to provide general information about Design Review and offer detailed instructions about the application and submittal requirements and review process.

### What Is Design Review?

Design Review is a component of the Master Use Permit (MUP) application and is required for most new commercial, mixed-use, and multifamily developments.

Design Review provides a forum through which neighborhoods, developers, architects, and City staff can work together to ensure that new developments contribute positively to Seattle's neighborhoods. Design Review has three principal objectives:

1. To encourage better design and site planning that enhances the character of the city and ensures that new development sensitively fits into neighborhoods;
2. To provide flexibility in the application of development standards; and
3. To improve communication and participation among developers, neighbors and the City early in the design and siting of new development.

Design Review is administered by the Department of Planning and Development (DPD), as are other MUP components like environmental review (SEPA), variances, rezones, etc.

Like these other components, Design Review applications involve public notice and opportunity for comment. Unlike other components, most projects subject to Design Review are brought before a Design Review Board for its recommendations, or, alternatively, to DPD staff in what is referred to as Administrative Design Review.

The final decision on the Design Review component is made by the DPD Director, along with decisions on any other MUP components. This decision is appealable to the City's Hearing Examiner.

In order to provide greater predictability to designers, developers and property owners, and ensure greater consistency in Design Review decisionmaking, the City has published two sets of siting and design guidelines. One applies throughout the City's neighborhoods and is titled *Design Review: Guidelines for Multifamily & Commercial Buildings*; the other applies to downtown Seattle and is titled *Design Review: Guidelines for Downtown Development*. To date, six neighborhoods have adopted and published extensions of the multifamily and commercial guidelines, with more in the works.

These publications include a discussion of the Design Review process and provide guidelines covering the elements of site planning; height, bulk and scale; architectural elements, expression, and materials; pedestrian environment; public amenities, vehicular access and parking; and streetscape and landscaping. (See page 6 of this CAM for further information on how to obtain these and other relevant documents.)

**NOTE:** *Since several neighborhood-specific design guidelines have recently been adopted, the Design Review Board consults both the Citywide Design Guidelines and the neighborhood design guidelines when reviewing development proposals in neighborhoods outside of downtown. Neighborhood-specific design guidelines augment the Citywide design guidelines by addressing more specific design concerns that have historical, cultural or architectural significance to a particular neighborhood. An applicant should always check with DPD to determine whether a particular neighborhood has a set of adopted, supplementary guidelines.*

[www.seattle.gov/dpd](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd)



City of Seattle  
Department of Planning & Development

Gregory J. Nickels, Mayor      Diane Sugimura, Director

700 5th Avenue, Suite 2000  
P.O. Box 34019  
Seattle, WA 98124-4019  
(206) 684-8600

## What are the Different Types of Design Review?

**Design Review:** All projects over the thresholds described in the chart on page 2 require at least two public design review meetings as part of the MUP process. The Design Review Board holds an early

design guidance meeting, followed by a recommendation meeting.

**Administrative Design Review:** Multifamily and commercial projects under the SEPA thresholds may voluntarily submit to Design Review in exchange for consideration of development standard departures.

ZONE	THRESHOLD
Lowrise 3 (L3) & Lowrise 4 (L4)	More than 8 dwelling units and/or 4,000 sq. ft. nonresidential space
Midrise (MR) & Highrise (HR)	More than 20 dwelling units and/or 4,000 sq. ft. nonresidential space
Neighborhood Commercial 1, 2, & 3 (NC1, NC2 & NC3)	More than 4 dwelling units and/or 4,000 sq. ft. nonresidential space
Commercial 1 & 2 (C1 & C2) when adjacent or across a street or alley from SF zoned land, in Urban Villages, or in a specific mapped area within the Lake City neighborhood. (See SMC 23.41.004.A)	More than 4 dwelling units and/or 12,000 sq. ft. nonresidential space
Seattle Cascade Mixed (SCM)	More than 4 dwelling units and/or 12,000 sq.ft. nonresidential space
Stadium Transition Overlay District	Any structure that exceeds 120 feet in width on any single street frontage
Downtown Office Core 1 & 2 (DOC 1 & DOC 2)	More than 20 dwelling units and/or 50,000 sq.ft. nonresidential space
Downtown Retail Core (DRC), Downtown Mixed Commercial (DMC), Downtown Mixed Residential (DMR), Downtown Harborfront 1 & 2 (DH1 & DH2)	More than 20 dwelling units and/or 20,000 sq.ft. nonresidential space

These projects are not reviewed by the Design Review Boards; rather they follow a similar process administered by DPD staff.

**Voluntary Design Review:** The full Design Review process, including board review, is used for projects exceeding SEPA thresholds in LDT, L1, and L2 zones, and in C1 and C2 zones not included in the chart on page 2, where development standard departure is sought.

## What Is Development Standard Departure?

A departure allows a project to achieve flexibility in the application of many prescriptive Land Use Code development standards. In order to allow a departure from a Land Use Code standard(s), an applicant must demonstrate that it would result in a development that better meets the intent of the design guidelines. Projects for which Design Review is either required or voluntary may be granted departures from the following Land Use Code standards.

The following development standards may be considered in all applicable zones:

- Structure width and depth limits
- Setbacks requirements
- Modulation requirements
- SMC zone facade requirements
- Design, location, and access to parking requirements
- Open space requirements
- Lot coverage limits
- Screening and landscaping requirements
- Standards for the location and design of nonresidential uses in mixed-use buildings
- Roof height in L-3 zones within Urban Centers
- Building height within Roosevelt Commercial Core and Ballard Municipal Center master plan area
- Reduction in required parking for certain uses in the Ballard Municipal Center master plan
- Downtown or Stadium Transition Overlay District street facade requirements
- Downtown upper-level development standards
- Downtown coverage and floor size limits
- Downtown maximum wall dimensions
- Downtown street level use requirements

- Downtown rooftop coverage limits
- Building height in Lowrise zones and parking standards in Midrise and Commercial zones to protect existing trees

Notably absent from this list are residential density, amount of required parking, general structure height, and Downtown view corridor standards, to name a few. These standards cannot be modified through Development Standard Departure.

## What Is The Design Review Board?

Most projects subject to Design Review are brought before a Design Review Board, both before and after MUP application, as further explained below. (As mentioned above, smaller projects, under SEPA thresholds, that may be submitted voluntarily are reviewed administratively by staff and are not subject to Design Review Board review.)

The city is divided into **seven areas** (boundaries are indicated on the map on page 7), each with its own **five-member Board**. The five volunteer members represent the following constituencies:

- **Three at-large** members representing
  - design professions
  - development interests
  - general community interests
- **Two locally nominated** members representing
  - residential interests
  - business interests

In addition, there is **one At-Large Board** comprised of three members who may review projects throughout the City and/or who may individually substitute on other Design Review Boards when needed to maintain a quorum (a quorum is three members).

## What Is the Design Review Process?

### 1. PRESUBMITTAL CONFERENCE

The first step for a project applicant is to complete a **Presubmittal Conference Request Form\*** and to schedule the conference with DPD Applicant Services Center (ASC) staff. At this conference the project applicant will receive a copy of the design guidelines and learns about the review process. Completed forms may be dropped off, mailed or faxed to the ASC.\*

A Land Use Planner will review your request, note pertinent information, and forward a presubmittal conference request form to support staff, who will call you back with available appointment times and an assigned project number. Fees for presubmittal conferences and additional hours of review are listed in the current version of the Fee Subtitle available online at [www.seattle.gov/dpd/about/dpdfees.htm](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/about/dpdfees.htm) and at the Public Resource Center on the 20th Floor of Seattle Municipal Tower at 700 Fifth Ave., (206) 684-8467.

At the presubmittal conference, the project site, context and general development program will be discussed, as well as the Design Review process. This is an opportunity to discuss possible development standard departures or other important preliminary issues.

**NOTE:** *Applicants who have participated in the Design Review process previously may request a waiver of the requirement for a preapplication conference. A waiver request should be directed to the Manager of the Design Review Program. Please remember, however, that the complexity of certain projects and/or their location in certain areas may warrant the need for a presubmittal conference to discuss other important land use issues.*

## **2. APPLICATION FOR EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE**

In addition to the presubmittal conference, the proponent must fill out an **Address/Records Worksheet\*** and **Pre-Application Site Visit Request Form\*** and submit them to the ASC. In-person service at the ASC is available during the morning hours; otherwise, worksheets dropped off or sent in will be processed as quickly as possible, and the ASC staff will call applicants once the address/records work has been completed. You may also receive comments from the site inspector if applicable. If no presubmittal conference was held, a project number will be assigned at this time.

Once the proponent has completed the Address/Records Worksheet and Pre-Application Site Visit step, s/he should contact the ASC to request an **Early Design Guidance Application intake appointment.**

Prior to this intake appointment, the proponent must fill out an **Application for Early Design Guidance** form (see Attachment A on page 9). At the appointment, the proponent must bring the completed application form, together with three copies of the 11" x 17" packet to include simple and clear graphic materials illustrating:

- the site
- zoning, existing uses and structures

- topography and tree survey
- a vicinity map, indicating the surrounding uses, structures and zoning, including an axonometric, or other three-dimensional drawing or photos, of the surrounding built environment
- site plan and conceptual proposal using perspective drawings or plans indicating the approximate zoning development potential
- three feasible alternative concepts (e.g. siting, massing, open space, or facade treatments or concepts) in addition to code-driven alternatives that are presented in the same graphic context (This will help evidence your thinking so that the Board and public better understand your preferred alternative.)
- similar drawings to show any possible development standard departures
- a statement of the development objectives for the site

More advanced, schematic design renderings or other more fully developed design illustrations are NOT expected at this time. The proponent should include a statement of the development objectives for the site, including a statement of the of potential development standard departures, if known.

**At this time the proponent must pay for six (6) hours of Land Use Review time figured at the current hourly review rate. (2004 hrly. rate of \$250 x 6 = \$1500)**

Although not required at the application intake appointment, the proponent will be expected to provide additional information or materials for the Design Review Board's Early Design Guidance public meeting, such as photographic streetscape presentations, three alternative massing models, or other information to be determined by the Land Use Planner assigned to the application. The applicant should bring photographic examples of projects that they have completed to the public meeting.

**NOTE:** *The Downtown Design Guidelines booklet mentioned on page 1 includes a more detailed discussion of the Early Design Guidance submittal requirements.*



### 3. **EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE DESIGN REVIEW BOARD MEETING**

Once the Early Design Guidance application has been taken in, DPD staff will set up an evening public meeting in the Design Review Board area where the project site is located. The Design Review Board members, the general public, and the project proponent(s) are invited. Notice of the meeting is provided in DPD's weekly Land Use Information Bulletin, through mailed notice to residents and property owners within 300 feet of the site, and with a yellow placard posted at the project site. This meeting usually occurs within 30 days of the Early Design Guidance intake appointment. (The Bulletin is available online at [www.seattle.gov/dpd/notices](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/notices).)

At the meeting the proponents will present information about the surrounding context and the site, as well as describe their development objectives and share early alternative design and/or siting, massing, open space, or facade treatments or concepts. Citizens are invited to offer their comments and concerns regarding the siting and design of development on the site. The Design Review Board members will identify those design guidelines of highest priority for the site, as well as incorporate any relevant comments from the public in their early design guidance.

DPD staff will summarize this Early Design Guidance in a report that will be sent to all parties in attendance at this meeting and/or who have written to the Department regarding the project.

### 4. **PROJECT DESIGN**

The proponent(s) and architect(s) are expected to respond to the Early Design Guidance in developing their project design. On occasion early design development of a project will go back to the Design Review Board prior to MUP application for additional guidance or response, as well as public comment.

### 5. **MASTER USE PERMIT APPLICATION**

Following the Design Review Board early design guidance meeting, the project proponents may submit a schematic level design (reflecting the Early Design Guidance report's siting and design recommendations) as part of the MUP application. When the proponent applies for a MUP, a Design Review component will be included, along with other necessary components, such as zoning, SEPA, Administrative Conditional Use, etc.

In order to prepare a MUP application, the proponent must schedule a **land use application intake appoint-**

**ment** for the MUP application, which will include a Design Review component. Upon application, the proponent must fill out and submit an **Application for Design Review** (see Attachment B on page 11).

In addition, the proponent must submit standard MUP-level plans and drawings, making sure to indicate such details as exterior materials and/or colors, as well as identifying and justifying in narrative form any requested development standard departures. **For early design guidance projects entailing hourly fees in addition to the minimum land use review fee, all outstanding fees must be paid upon applications for the MUP. Any hours paid by the minimum land use review fee but not spent at the time of application for the MUP will be credited toward land use review of the MUP application.** (If the preapplication conference was held less than six months prior to this time, that fee may be deducted from this amount.)

In many cases, Design Review applications may require submittal of models, photo montages, computer-assisted graphic images, or other graphic material to aid Design Review decisionmaking. These details will be arranged with the assigned DPD Land Use Planner, who will indicate when best to submit such additional information.

Once the application has been accepted, a large sign will be placed on the site, mailed notice will be sent, and a public comment period will be provided, allowing citizens to comment on any and all aspects of the project, including siting and design issues.

### 6. **DESIGN REVIEW BOARD RECOMMENDATION MEETING**

Once the project design has been sufficiently developed in response to the early design guidance, the Design Review Board will reconvene to consider the proposed design at an evening meeting open to the public. The planner will request your 11x17 presentation packet in advance in order to mail it to the Board members for review before the meeting. After a presentation of the design by the proponents, summary recommendations from DPD staff, and opportunity for public comment, the Board members will review the design in light of the concerns and recommendations expressed, as well as the previously identified early design guidance.

The Board will deliberate and offer to the Department its official recommendations on the design and the appropriateness of any requested development standard departures. A written summary of the Board's recommendations are sent to all parties of records.

## 7. DIRECTOR'S DECISION

The final decision on the Design Review component of a MUP application is made by the DPD Director. However, if the Design Review Board's recommendation was offered by at least four members, this will be considered a consensus recommendation that the Director must adopt in most cases. The Director may override the Board's recommendation only if he/she believes the Board has made a clear error in the application of the guidelines, has exceeded its authority, or has required design changes that contravene other, nonwaivable local, state or federal requirements.

Conversely, when the Board's recommendation is supported by less than four members, the Director will give due consideration to the Board's recommendation in reaching his/her decision, along with any minority opinions, staff recommendations and public comment.

The Design Review decision by the Director will be issued together with the decisions on other MUP components related to the project, with written notice to all parties of record, as well as notice in the weekly Land Use Information Bulletin (available online at [www.seattle.gov/dpd/notices](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/notices)). Final issuance often requires revisions to the MUP plans to comply with Design Review conditions.

## 8. APPEALS

As with other discretionary MUP-component decisions, the Design Review decision is appealable by any interested party. Appeals may be made during the 14-day appeal period by letter and a \$50 filing fee to the Seattle Hearing Examiner. The Hearing Examiner must afford substantial weight to the Director's decision, basing any decision to the contrary on a finding of clear error or omission, not simply of differing opinion or conclusion. There is no appeal of a Design Review decision to the City Council.

### When Should One Apply for a Building Permit?

While the concept of a MUP application allows for the potential incorporation of a Building Permit component, with Design Review projects in most instances it would be unwise to incur the expense of a Building Permit application at MUP application. This is due to the greater likelihood that Design Review decision-making may materially affect the project's design in a way that could require substantive revisions to Building Permit drawings.

While proponents may elect to incorporate a Building

Permit application in a particular MUP application, in general one should wait at least until the Design Review Board has held its final meeting and issued its recommendations to the DPD Director, if not until publication of the MUP decision.

## Additional Information on Design Review

Additional information on design review is available at the DPD Public Resource Center, located on the 20th floor of Seattle Municipal Tower at 700 Fifth Ave., (206) 684-8467. Available materials include:

- *Design Review: Guidelines for Multifamily & Commercial Buildings*, October 1993. Revised January 1998.
- *Design Review: Guidelines for Downtown Development*. April 1999.
- *Design Review: Some Helpful Information Regarding the Process*.
- Samples of Early Design Guidance presentation materials.
- Example packets and plans on a display rack for on-site review
- Director's Rule 7-94, "Design Review Program"

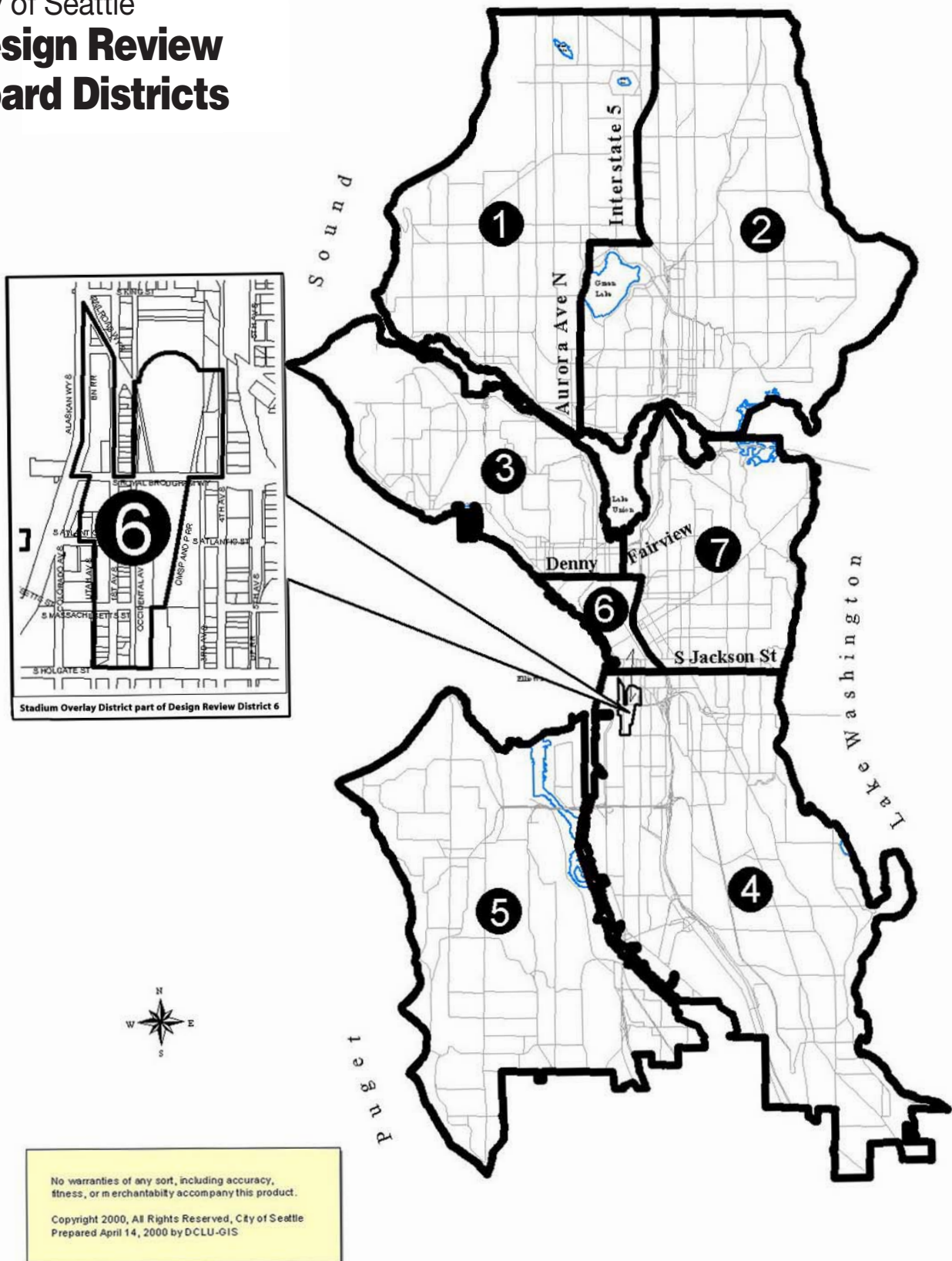
Many of the publications listed above are also available online at [www.seattle.gov/dpd/publications](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/publications). Director's Rules are available online at [www.seattle.gov/dpd/codes](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/codes).

Additionally, a folio of design resources is maintained by the CityDesign Office, located on the 19th floor of Seattle Municipal Tower. An online version of the folio is available online at [www.seattle.gov/dpd/citydesign](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/citydesign).

## Access to Information

Links to electronic versions of DPD **Client Assistance Memos (CAMs)**, **Director's Rules**, and the **Seattle Municipal Code** are available on the "Publications" and "Codes" pages of our website at [www.seattle.gov/dpd](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd). Paper copies of these documents, as well as additional regulations mentioned in this CAM, are available from our Public Resource Center, located on the 20th floor of Seattle Municipal Tower at 700 Fifth Ave. in downtown Seattle, (206) 684-8467.

City of Seattle  
**Design Review  
Board Districts**



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Prepared April 14, 2000 by DCLU-GIS

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**Attachment A**

City of Seattle  
**Application for  
Early Design Guidance**

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**PART I**

1. Property Address \_\_\_\_\_
2. Has the applicant had a PAID design review presubmittal conference within the last six months? \_\_\_\_\_  
If so, enter project number here: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Has the applicant completed and submitted an Address/Records Worksheet? \_\_\_\_\_ If no presubmittal conference was held, please enter here the project number assigned to this address:  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Owner/Lessee Name \_\_\_\_\_
5. Contact Person\* Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Firm \_\_\_\_\_  
Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_
6. Applicant's Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Relationship to Project \_\_\_\_\_
7. Design Professional: Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_
8. Applicant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

\*Only the **Contact Person** will receive notice of the meeting. The **Contact Person** is responsible for informing other pertinent parties.

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**PART II - Attach additional sheets as needed**

1. Please describe the existing site, including location, existing uses and/or structures, topographical or other physical features, etc.

**- OVER -**

2. Please indicate the site's zoning and any other overlay designations.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Please describe neighboring development and uses, including adjacent zoning, physical features, existing architectural and siting patterns, views, community landmarks, etc.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Please describe the proponent's development objectives for this site, indicating types of desired uses and approximate structure size(s), as well as any potential requests for departure from development standards.

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### **PART III**

**Together with a written response to the questions above, please provide the following graphic materials, in support of your application, as required by Section 23.41.014, Seattle Municipal Code:**

1. An initial site analysis addressing site opportunities and constraints, existing site conditions, indicating topography of the site and trees or other substantial vegetation, and the location of existing structures and other prominent elements on or abutting the site; and
2. A zoning envelope study which may include a 3-D drawing; and
3. A vicinity map, indicating the uses of all nearby buildings, and the zoning of nearby properties, including a massing diagram of near-by development (e.g. axonometric sketch, etc.); and
4. Concept-level design and/or design/siting alternatives in fulfillment of the proponent's general development objectives, as stated above.

**In addition, please provide the following at the Early Design Guidance meeting:**

1. Photo boards showing adjacent development, particularly indicating the general character of the streetscapes containing the subject site, as well as territorial or other views from the site, if any.
2. Five 11" x 17" packets of the above-cited information for the individual Board members and two for staff.

